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Random Notes on this and that

By RICHARD
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Neither of last week's openings, both off-Broadway presentations, served greatly to advance the state of the drama . . . While "The World of Gunter Grass" was virtually non-existent theatrically, it did provide some provocative, perverse and disturbing insights into the original mind and bizarre imagination of Germany's most impressive postwar novelist . . . As it turned out, "Bohiquee Creek" was actually not a play but a quartet of mood sketches about life in a small Negro community in the back waters of South Carolina . . . All four interludes seemed plain and clear, but I'm still uncertain of what took place behind a wharf in the final one.

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Whatever else the New York Times series on CIA demonstrated, it also suggested that the current melodramatic novel about espionage aren't necessarily exaggerated . . . Then there was the indication that advances in electronics may throw a lot of career spies out of work . . . Since even those who believe our stand in Viet Nam is necessary are uncomfortable over it, I thought Sen. Fulbright was an extremist when he called it a sign of "the

arrogance of power" and "war fever" . . . It is, of course, a matter of conjecture, but I wonder if Indonesia would have become so bold toward Peking if we had fled from Southeast Asia.

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It is evident that Indira Gandhi is having her troubles in India, but she can at least be congratulated on having the unpleasant Krishna Menon turn against her . . . The apparently growing restlessness of the Barcelona students hints that the presumed Spanish contentment with the Franco dictatorship may have been overestimated . . . News from Peking that the visiting Albanian premier was accorded a gigantic reception shows the almost pathetic eagerness of the Chinese to have proof any Communist country or leader is on their side . . . They can't have forgot-

ten that their last welcome guest was Nkrumah, who hardly profited by his visit.

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The late Hesketh Pearson's zestful appreciation of zestful people contributed greatly to making him one of the best of modern biographers . . . In the posthumous "Hesketh Pearson by Himself," the same warm vitality applied to his own varied career results in a frank and delightfully volume of memoirs . . . He contemplates his richly active life as soldier, actor and author with humor and candor, and his sidelights on the men who served as his subjects, especially Shaw, combine perceptiveness with a genuine liking for them . . . The frankness extends to his objective way of viewing his propensity for getting into personal jams of his own.

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B. Traven, author of "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre," is a mysterious American who lives a life of secrecy in Mexico and seems to be known to no one . . . That he is more than a determined eccentric is shown in his "The Night Visitor and Other Stories" . . . Ranging in subject from folk legend to peasant ways, these short tales, filled with affection for Mexicans, are fresh, simple and touching . . . Francis Clifford's "The Naked Runner" adds a vigorous touch of moral outrage to a dramatic suspense novel on the chilling brutalities of espionage in East Germany . . . Intense and grimly realistic, it has an unusually tricky but believable ending.

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No conventional guidebook is "Soho Night & Day," which has just been sent me from England . . . With Frank Norman's humorously knowing commentary and Jeffrey Bernard's striking photographs, it is an authoritative study, realistic but sympathetic, of the famous London district . . . The late Paula Strasberg was a devoted force in the theater and a fine woman . . . Tim Taylor, now writing a book of critical studies of Presidential press conferences, including LBJ's, was even braver when he did a column criticizing newspaper columnists . . . I admired Natalie Wood's humorous attitude toward the Harvard Lampoon's mock award until she called it